

# Coping Strategies for Evacuees

Evacuations elicit a variety of different feelings, but the universal response to an evacuation is a sense of not being in control of one's own life. The individual feels powerless, caught in a situation which affects every aspect of life. Since this feeling is so common, the following tips are suggested as ways to gain a measure of control over the situation.

- **Make contingency plans.** Decide ahead of time on a safehaven location, organize the documents to take to post, make plans for the children and have powers of attorney in order. Keep and use a copy of FLO's *Evacuation Plan: Don't Leave Home Without It*.
- **Plan for the long term.** Evacuations average 3 - 4 months. While the length of any evacuation is difficult to predict, those who plan for a longer rather than a shorter period of time experience fewer frustrations.
- **Use resources.** While in the Washington, D.C. area, take some courses at the Overseas Briefing Center. Consult with FLO employment staff about short-term employment. The licensed clinical social workers at the Department of State's Employee Consultation Service (or their equivalent in other agencies) may be helpful. These last two resources are available to evacuees who are not in Washington through telephone consultation.
- **Create a "normal" life.** Develop as normal a routine as possible for yourself and your children. If an evacuation lasts more than a month, you may choose to put the children in school. Get them involved in activities, and get involved yourself. Pursue hobbies, do volunteer work, or take a part-time job.
- **Keep in touch.** Stay in touch with fellow evacuees, with FLO, or your assigned point of contact (i.e. the Family Liaison Specialist for your agency) throughout the evacuation. You'll be up-to-date on the latest information from post, and enjoy mutual support with others in the same situation. FLO and your agency's family liaison representative phone regularly, and share with evacuees the phone numbers and addresses of other evacuees who have given such permission and any other pertinent information.

Evacuees sometimes do not return to post. They never get to say a proper good-bye. They must live with a sense of "unfinished business" about their post. Many experience an emotional loss. Most people who experience an evacuation are able to put it into perspective and go on; yet Foreign Service life never seems the same again. Experience may make evacuees more wary, and influence them to take contingency planning seriously in the future. Eventually, the memory of an evacuation becomes part of the rich tapestry of experiences, positive and negative, which make up the life of a Foreign Service family.

# Evacuation Definitions

**The primary purpose of the evacuation of a U.S. Mission is for the safety and security of Mission personnel and their families. The following definitions are in accordance with Department of State regulations. Please note that the military uses slightly different definitions for some of these terms.**

**Authorized Departure:** This type of evacuation is voluntary for official family members and non-emergency direct-hire employees. It allows the Chief of Mission greater flexibility in determining which employees or groups of employees may depart. There is no difference in benefits between authorized and ordered departure. *The employees and family members who choose to depart post on authorized departure may not choose when to return to post.* They may not return until the Under Secretary for Management has lifted the evacuation.

**Ordered Departure:** This type of evacuation is not voluntary. Family members and non-emergency staff are ordered to depart post on evacuation status. It is not uncommon for the status of an evacuation to shift from authorized to ordered, depending upon the situation at post. In some evacuations all staff must leave and operations are temporarily suspended at post.

A ***drawdown*** refers to the evacuation of family members and non-emergency staff, leaving emergency personnel at post. One of the tasks of the Emergency Action Committee at post is to determine the staff positions that would be necessary during a crisis. In an evacuation, the post would be ***drawndown*** to that number, unless the crisis required the temporary closure of the post.

**Safehaven:** When personnel and family members are evacuated from post, the official safehaven destination is the continental United States. Employees must report to their agency headquarters, while family members may choose a safehaven location anywhere in CONUS; they are not required to return to their home leave address. Employees may request an alternate foreign safehaven for family members; the request must be approved by the Under Secretary for Management.

**SEA:** Subsistence Expense Allowance, the allowance given to official evacuees, based on locality per diem.